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DE RUEHTA #0023/01 0120427  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
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FM AMEMBASSY ASTANA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7167  
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE 2323  
RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE  
RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE  
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 1685  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 2391  
RHMFISS/DEPT OF ENERGY WASHINGTON DC  
RUCPDOG/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHINGTON DC  
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHINGTON DC  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC  
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RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC 1730  
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC  
RHMFIUU/CDR USCENCOM MACDILL AFB FL

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ASTANA 000023

SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/CEN, DRL

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ECON](#) [SOCI](#) [RS](#) [KZ](#)

SUBJECT: ETHNIC HARMONY IN NORTHERN KAZAKHSTAN

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REFTELS: A. ASTANA 0010

[1](#)B. 09 ASTANA 0959

[1](#)1. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for public Internet.

[1](#)2. (SBU) SUMMARY: During recent visits to Kazakhstan's Kostanai and North Kazakhstan Oblasts, interlocutors emphasized the tolerant nature of Kazakhstani society and government efforts to encourage ethnic harmony. According to Viktor Sayko, Director of one of the North Kazakhstan Oblast's three organizations of ethnic Russians, ethnic Russians are generally content as Kazakhstani citizens, but some worry about potential compulsory study of the Kazakh language and employment discrimination. END SUMMARY.

KOSTANAI OFFICIALS PRAISE INTER-ETHNIC TOLERANCE

[1](#)3. (SBU) Tatyana Zueva, Kostanai Oblast's Internal Policy Department representative, told PolOff that the oblast's 950,000 residents represent more than 120 nationalities. The region's main ethnic groups include Russians, Kazakhs, and Germans. Zueva, an ethnic Russian, spoke often about Kazakh traditions and their importance in Kostanai. Zueva mentioned her studies of the Kazakh language at the Akimat (regional administration), and pointed out tributes to Kazakh culture, by artists of various ethnicities, in Kostanai's art gallery. Zueva emphasized that Kazakhstan has experienced no major incidents of ethnic violence since its independence in 1991.

HOUSE OF FRIENDSHIP FLOURISHES

[1](#)4. (SBU) At Kostanai's House of Friendship, a large two-story building with 16 small offices for some of the major ethnic groups in Kazakhstan, PolOff met its young director, Anton Trukhanov. A former journalist and television commentator, Trukhanov explained the importance of teaching the children of various nationalities about their cultures and languages in order to continue the city's development as a harmonious, multi-cultural and artistically-vibrant locale. Student dance and musical performances for a New Year celebration occupied the House of Friendship's theater during PolOff's visit. Kostanai's largest ethnic groups -- Russians, Germans, Ukrainians, and Tatars -- have centrally-located offices near the Director's, while a statue of a sheaf of wheat, hung with

the flags of ethnic groups in Kazakhstan, dominates the building's lobby.

#### NORTH KAZAKHSTAN TOUTS ETHNIC HARMONY

15. (SBU) Erlik Zhandildin, Director of North Kazakhstan Oblast Akimat's Internal Policy Department, joined Kostanai Oblast officials in touting inter-ethnic accord in northern Kazakhstan. He noted his oblast's 650,000 residents represent 100 nationalities, mainly Russians, Kazakhs, Poles, and Germans. The region also established a 125-house settlement, called Bayterek, for Oralmans. (NOTE: The Kazakhstan government has been encouraging ethnic Kazakhs, most of whom left Kazakhstan before the Soviet period, to return to Kazakhstan. Returnees are called Oralmans. END NOTE.) Zhandildin, an ethnic Kazakh, attributed the region's ethnic harmony to waves of migration over the last 100 years, as well as to the central and local government's continuing efforts to foster harmony, for instance, by funding ethno-cultural associations. As Zhandildin told PolOff, "each person here has their own world view; in North Kazakhstan oblast, we believe in letting people live."

#### ETHNIC RUSSIANS LIVE COMFORTABLY IN NORTH KAZAKHSTAN

16. (SBU) In an arrangement similar to Kostanai Oblast's House of Friendship, North Kazakhstan Oblast's Akimat provides rent-free space and modest funding for cultural events to 20 cultural centers, including Viktor Sayko's "Russian Community" organization. Sayko asserted that ethnic Russians, who constitute 80% of the region's population, live very comfortably in North Kazakhstan Oblast. He argued that emigration decreased in the last few years due to good relations between ethnic Russians and Kazakhs. Sayko further noted that most of the thousand citizens who left Kazakhstan within the last few years went to Omsk, close to Kazakhstan, and Kaliningrad,

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which is seen as a gateway to Europe. According to Sayko, most emigres were either unemployed, or "moved out of concern for the long-term future of their children." Sayko said most patrons of his organization's free consultations about emigration issues thought they could more easily obtain jobs or live on their pensions in Russia. However, many have found Kazakhstan's economy better, he underlined, and have returned.

#### DIFFERING VIEWS OF ETHNIC RUSSIAN ORGANIZATIONS

17. (SBU) According to Sayko, Petropavlovsk's two other Russian organizations "complain more" about ethnic Russians' difficulties in modern Kazakhstan, especially the study of the Kazakh language. In addition, he mentioned their criticism of his organization for "accommodating" the Akimat. Sayko highlighted job discrimination as the most important concern. At the same time, he acknowledged that the refusal of many ethnic Russians to learn Kazakh makes it difficult for them to occupy certain positions.

#### WHAT ROLE SHOULD THE RUSSIAN GOVERNMENT PLAY?

18. (SBU) Sayko, who praised the Kazakhstan government and President Nazarbayev for maintaining inter-ethnic harmony, said he gathered one million signatures in support of Nazarbayev in 2005. Noting the 40 million ethnic Russians worldwide, Sayko advocated that ethnic Russians develop a sense of community and ethnic pride -- within an overarching identity as Kazakhstanian citizens -- based on the model of strong Armenian, Jewish, and Korean communities. According to Sayko, the Russian Embassy sometimes provides small grants to Russian cultural centers for special activities, and his organization encourages participation in events, such as the third congress of Russian-speaking populations. However, Sayko asserted ethnic Russians in Kazakhstan should not involve themselves in political issues between Kazakhstan and the Russian Federation. Commenting on a Russian initiative to distribute Russian "identity cards," Sayko told PolOff, "I have a Kazakhstanian passport, and that is the only identity document I need." Sayko added that his organization is considering carefully the proposal even though he personally sees no benefits.

#### AN ETHNIC RUSSIAN ORGANIZATION'S VIEW ON THE CUSTOMS UNION

¶9. (SBU) In response to PolOff's inquiry about the Customs Union effect on the North Kazakhstan oblast, and particularly ethnic Russians, Sayko highlighted the positive response of businessmen involved in trade with Russia. However, he also asserted ethnic Russians are more concerned about the movement of people than goods. According to Sayko, Kazakhstani citizens previously could travel to Russia for up to 90 days without a visa, but had to register with immigration authorities within three days of arrival. Sayko praised amended regulations, which allow visa-and-registration-free travel to Russia for up to one month.

¶10. (SBU) COMMENT: Ethnic Russians in Kazakhstan sometimes have been portrayed as a fifth column of support for the Russian Federation. Post considers this assessment grossly inaccurate. While most Russian-Kazakhstanis have relatives and other ties to Russia, the vast majority perceive themselves as loyal Kazakhstani citizens. While some worry about the perceived employment bias in favor of Kazakhs, most have chosen to remain in Kazakhstan. A few ethnic Slavs, most considered to be of Russian ethnicity, occupy influential positions within the government, notably Vladimir Shkolnik, President of KazAtomProm, and Roman Vassilenko, one of Foreign Minister Kanat Saudabayev's right-hand men. Despite the plethora of views about ethnic relations in Kazakhstan, authorities throughout the country have clearly worked hard -- and generally succeeded -- in the creation of a peaceful and harmonious society. Although all seems relatively well now, any significant rise in Kazakh nationalism could cause problems in the future. END COMMENT.

HOAGLAND